

Record

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Sacrifices behind international increases

RICHMOND, Va. (BP) — More than 330,000 people are following Jesus Christ this year because servants of God like Little Wang and Liang were willing to die.

Little Wang, a new believer, traveled 10 hours with two other Christians to preach to a people group different from his own living in an Asian region with no Gospel witness.

A village mob met them shouting, "The spirits of the mountains rule our land! You dogs have only been here 500 years and you know nothing. You have stolen our land and now you wish to steal our gods as well. Now you will pay for this!"

Little Wang did pay, with his life. The mob beat the three Christians with sticks and farm tools. Two escaped with broken bones, but an enraged young man beat Little Wang to death.

Little Wang's brethren limped home to tell their church and Little Wang's wife and 10-year-old son the sad news.

Church members met and decided the two survivors would go back to preach again. Little Wang's widow, Liang, slowly rose.

"I will go too," she said. The church grew silent; everyone knew she might never return.

The trio slipped into the village by night, sleeping fitfully beside a pigpen. When day came, word spread of their presence and another mob quickly formed.



ON THE RISE — Increases in baptisms, new churches, preaching points and the overall number of churches and members were recorded in 1998 by Southern Baptist missionaries and their co-workers, according to International Mission Board statistics reported for 1998. (IMB graphic)

Liang boldly stepped forward and said: "I am the widow of the man you killed. My husband is not dead, however. He is living in paradise with our God. If he were here, he would forgive you. I forgive you as well, because God has forgiven me."

"If you want to hear more about this God, meet us under the big tree outside town this evening."

That night most of the village came to hear about Liang's forgiving God. Many gave their lives to Jesus Christ that night and were disciplined in the following days.

A few months later three of

the new believers visited Liang's church, bringing greetings and a love offering from the brand-new church in the once-hostile village. One of them came forward.

"I am the man who murdered Little Wang," he confessed. "The Lord has graciously forgiven me and I ask your forgiveness as well."

"I, and our entire church, owe an eternal debt of gratitude to Little Wang and Liang for bringing us the message of life."

"We want to give this offering to help support Liang and we wish to pledge monthly support."

Little Wang wasn't the only martyr of 1998. Their courage and obedience typify the faith lived by millions of Baptists

and Great Commission partners working worldwide with more than 4,500 IMB missionaries.

God's power, and their obedience, brought those 333,034 new believers into the Kingdom, a 13.1% increase over 1997's total.

Here's what else his power wrought in 1998 through International Mission Board missionaries and their partners:

- ◆ 4,223 new churches, a 25.4% increase over 1997.

- ◆ 31,567 preaching points, a 41.7% jump.

- ◆ a 7.7% net increase in churches worldwide, bringing the total to 46,833.

- ◆ a 5.7% increase in total Baptist church members, to more than 44 million.

More open "harvest fields" cannot be ignored. Nigerian Baptists, long-time statistical leaders in evangelism and church growth, reported more than 500 new congregations last year. Ghana, which has fewer than 1,000 churches, added 193 in a single year.

The strategic reason for growth is church-planting movements begun and nurtured by God, through the hands and feet of those who follow him to areas where he is working.

A church-planting movement is the spontaneous, rapid multiplication of churches among a people group that enables them to reach their entire people — then to reach out to other peoples.

One day in eternity, we'll rejoice over it with Little Wang — and with the young man who shed his blood.

WHAT'S IN THE RECORD

Patterson Place dedicated

Moore shares life stories

WMU meetings set

Sunday School lessons

LifeWay Top Ten best sellers

HARDBACK

1. Just Like Jesus, Max Lucado (Nelson)
2. Experiencing God Day By Day, Henry Blackaby (B&H)
3. The Weigh Down Diet, Gwen Shamblin (Doubleday)
4. Fresh Wind, Fresh Fire, Jim Cymbala (Zondervan)
5. Things Pondered, Beth Moore (B&H)
6. Millennium Bug, Michael Hyatt (Nelson)
7. Enter His Gates, Charles Stanley (Nelson)
8. What Is So Amazing About Grace, Philip Yancy (Zondervan)
9. Purpose Driven Church, Rick Warren (Zondervan)
10. More Precious than Silver, Joni Erickson-Tada (Zondervan)

PAPERBACK

1. Stories From the Heart, Alice Gray (Multnomah)
2. I Kissed Dating Goodbye, Joshua Harris (Multnomah)
3. Millennium Meltdown, Grant Jeffries (Appalacian)
4. Experiencing God, Henry Blackaby (B&H)
5. Y2K: Millennium Bug, Shaunti Feldham (Multnomah)
6. When I'm On My Knees, Anita Donihue (Barbour)
7. E. M. Bounds on Prayer, E. M. Bounds (Whitaker House)
8. Morning and Evening, Charles Spurgeon (Whitaker House)
9. Five Love Languages, Gary Chapman (Moody)
10. 15 Minutes Alone with God, Emily Barnes (Harvest House)

Looking back

10 years ago

An invitation-only gathering of Southern Baptist conservatives in Atlanta is attended by four Miss. pastors: Gerald Harris of Colonial Heights, Jackson; Terry Williams of Meadowview Church, Starkville; Ken Alford of Morrison Hts., Clinton; and Gibbie McMillan of South 28th Ave. Church, Hattiesburg.

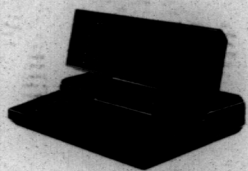
20 years ago

Southern Baptist Convention (SBC) President Jimmy Allen and other SBC leaders meet with the People's Republic of China's new ambassador to the United States to express Southern Baptist interest in sharing the Gospel in mainland China.

50 years ago

Heidelberg Church, Heidelberg, moves into their new church plant, modern in every respect with stained glass windows in the auditorium and changing rooms on either side of the baptistry. The education building has four assembly rooms, 12 classrooms, a kitchen, and pastor's study.

EDITOR'S NOTEBOOK



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New dangers, old story

For everyone who works inside the Southern Baptist Convention (SBC) Building in downtown Nashville, the world stood still on March 5. A deadly threat was made, people were frightened, and Kingdom work was hampered while the emergency was addressed (see article on opposite page).

To untold relief, the danger of anthrax contamination from a letter delivered to the building was determined to be a hoax, but not before four people underwent an uncomfortable and inconvenient hosing with bleach and water.

Many other building employees were ordered to stay at their desks, in some cases not being allowed a lunch hour or bathroom break until the "all-clear" was sounded several hours later by local emergency response officials and building administrators.

There was good reason for all the draconian precautions. *Bacillus anthracis* in its airborne state can be inhaled into the lungs, where it quickly takes hold and rapidly overwhelms the body with chills, fever, dysentery, and convulsions. Death comes swiftly.

If you haven't yet stopped and offered your personal prayer of thankfulness for the safety of our Christian brothers and sisters caught up in this scare, do it now. This could have been a very serious situation.

While you're at it, pray also for the warped person or group who for some unknown reason decided to use terrorism against an innocent group of people they've likely never met. Pray that they will find the peace of Jesus and forsake the worldly anger that consumes them.

Lastly, ask God to empower you — to empower all of us — to continue our work to reach every single person on Earth with the

Good News that Jesus saves, even in the face of such dangers and threats to our well-being.

That's really been a part of the Christian faith all along. Substitute swords, guns, and hungry lions for anthrax, and one can draw a pretty accurate picture of Christianity for the past two millennia.

We Americans, comfortable behind our insulating shores and powerful military system in the most Christian-populated nation on the planet, tend to forget that we are an historical exception.

From the earliest days through our modern day, Christians around the world have been persecuted, tortured, slaughtered, enslaved, and otherwise mistreated in ways that defy imagination.

We don't know what that's like, but we're beginning to get a little taste of it. As we contest to be heard in the public conversation of this country, we can expect more threats.

As we speak boldly against the sin raging through our land, we should anticipate the vilifications and demonizations that inevitably follow politically-incorrect behavior. Such is the state of American society.

We must not be caught unprepared. First, pray without ceasing for the faith and strength to stay the course.

Secondly, don't fail to prepare yourself and your church for the possibility of such danger. How would you react if you found an "anthrax letter" hidden behind a baby bed in your church nursery? Would you know what to do to protect yourself and



others? Would the church leadership know how to respond?

For that matter, does your church have an emergency plan for tornadoes and fire?

If you can't answer all those questions affirmatively, it's time to contact the emergency response agencies in your area.

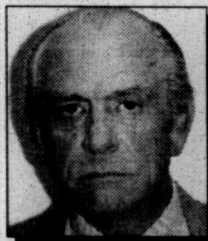
Someone in the SBC Building in Nashville knew what to do. You and your church should know, too. In our crazy world, to do otherwise is to court tragedy.

GUEST OPINION:

The addict next door

By Al McRae, special consultant
for alcohol and other drug issues

Miss. Baptist Christian Action Comm.



What does the addict look like? Is he old or young? Is he black or white? Is he even a he? Can an addict be a young girl, a grown woman, or an elderly lady? Is the addict rich or poor? Is the addict educated or uneducated?

The answer to these questions is, "all of the above." The addict can be — and is — every man. He looks like your next-door neighbor, your minister, or your lawyer.

In my work in the field of alcoholism and drug addiction, I have found common misconceptions of who the addict is, or what the addict does.

We hear statements such as: "I can't be an alcoholic, I only drink beer," or "I only drink wine." Addicts tell us that they are still working, so they can't be addicted.

Other statements we hear are: "She only drinks at bedtime to get some rest," or "I only take the drugs the doctor gives me."

What we don't hear is that the person is going to three or four doctors getting many prescriptions for their drug of choice.

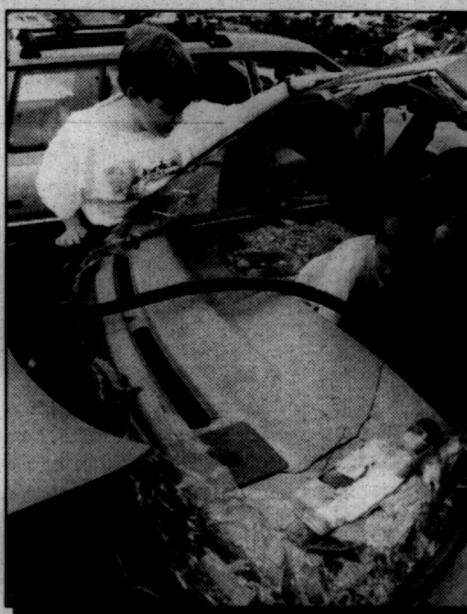
One of the most common misconceptions is that you cannot help an addict until he wants help. This is not true.

Most addicts don't know they need help. Their drug of

choice tells them that it is their best friend. It tells them that life would not be life without their use.

Alcoholism and other drug addictions will erode the vitality of our state and nation.

We read in the newspapers about drug trafficking and crack houses, but we don't hear about the other major problems that alcoholism and other



**Alcohol and Drug
Abuse Awareness
Sunday
March 21, 1999**

drug addictions cause.

One of the other problems is rising health care costs.

The untreated addict is estimated to use ten times the medical services of a non-addict.

Another related problem is crime and prison overcrowding. Eighty percent of criminal defendants are addicted.

Workplace productivity is affected.

Untreated addicts cost American businesses \$100 billion each year.

Families suffer. Millions of babies are born into families scarred by addiction.

We in Mississippi sometimes think we do not have the same problems as other areas of the country. In some ways we are correct, but not in talking about addiction.

In my work I have seen all of these things happen here in Mississippi.

I have seen 13-year-old children with advanced alcohol-induced liver disease.

I have seen an 80-year-old retired man addicted to crack.

I have seen Mississippi families devastated by addiction.

I have had grammar school children ask me how they can get home without being harassed by drug dealers.

It is most important that on March 21 — Alcohol and Drug Abuse Awareness Sunday across the Southern Baptist Convention — we raise our voices from our pulpits and pews about this killer who lives in our midst.

If the church fails to address this ever-pressing and growing problem, then God help us.

McRae works in the Behavioral Health Services Dept. of Baptist Health Systems, Inc., in Jackson.

Anthrax scare rattles SBC Building in Nashville

NASHVILLE, Tenn. (BP) — No illness was reported by employees as the Southern Baptist Convention (SBC) Building reopened March 9 after a suspicious letter opened March 5 prompted a number of

precautionary steps by Nashville emergency officials. Four employees of the SBC Executive Committee and a fire department captain underwent a decontamination wash of 10% Clorox and water, in addition

to being given antibiotics for possible exposure to deadly anthrax bacteria. The SBC Building was closed throughout the weekend and on Monday, March 8.

The letter, postmarked on the West Coast, was forwarded by the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) to a lab for tests, the results of which are expected within a few weeks.

The letter was opened in the Executive Committee offices on the SBC Building's seventh floor.

Bill Merrell, vice president of convention relations for the Executive Committee, said local authorities were contacted and precautions they recommended were taken.

Emergency officials, who were on the scene for more than four hours, responded from the FBI, Metro Police Department, Metro Health Department, Nashville Fire Department and Metro Office of Emergency Management. Numerous emergency vehicles were dispatched to the scene.

The suspicious envelope did not appear to contain any toxic contents, Merrell said of the authorities' initial assessment.

"I was stunned" upon opening the envelope, said the first employee to see the contents of the letter.

Later came "a peace about it, knowing it must have been a hoax," she said.

Jack Wilkerson, vice president for business and finance, and one of the four employees exposed to the letter, said, "We're thankful all of our employees are OK."

Sandwiches and other food items were delivered from LifeWay Christian Resources' in-house cafeteria across the street, for the confined Executive Committee staff members and the assisting emergency workers.



QUICK RESPONSE — Emergency vehicles were on the scene March 5 shortly after authorities were alerted when a suspicious letter was opened by an employee of the Southern Baptist Convention (SBC) Executive Committee at the SBC Building in Nashville. Four SBC employees and a fire captain underwent a decontamination wash and were given antibiotics, but none reported any illness as of March 9. (Photo by Jim Veneman)



**THE
SECOND
FRONT PAGE**

**THE BAPTIST
Record**

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Garaywa's Patterson Place is dedicated

By Carl M. White
Associate Editor

CLINTON, Miss. — Dedication ceremonies for Patterson Place, the new adult lodge at Camp Garaywa in Clinton, were held on site March 15 just prior to the start of the 1999 Woman's Missionary Union (WMU) annual meeting at Morrison Heights Church, Clinton.

The \$1.5 million two-story lodge, named Patterson Place in honor of former Mississippi Woman's Missionary Union

(WMU) executive director Marjean Patterson of Clinton, will provide 30 hotel-like rooms, meeting space, and kitchen facilities for adult groups desiring an easily-accessed facility located in the central part of the state.

"We are excited to be here today," said Rebecca Williams of Gautier, president of the Miss. WMU, as she welcomed a standing room only crowd inside the nearly completed building.

"Of course, we are dedicating this in the name of one very special lady," she said.

"This place — Patterson Place — is our compliment to her," said Lois Henderson of Clinton, a longtime Miss. WMU leader.

"We have admiration for Marjean for her love of the Lord, her love of the church, and her love for her adopted state.

"We have gratitude for her 41 years of service to Mississippi WMU, (and) for the vision that led Mississippi WMU to be one of the top states in missions support in the Southern Baptist Convention," Henderson said.

Eugene Dobbs, executive assistant for the Mississippi Baptist Convention Board (MBCB), pointed out that Mississippi Baptists have given over \$110 million to the Southern Baptist Convention's Lottie Moon Christmas Offering for International Missions in the 27 years Patterson served as head of Miss. WMU.

"There has been a marvelous partnership between the MBCB and the Miss. WMU," Dobbs said, "a mutually beneficial relationship that has served all of Miss. and the Kingdom of God well."

"The mission of Garaywa is missions," observed Dobbs, who challenged the Miss. WMU to "honor our past, to seize our present, and to ensure our future."

"The ultimate goal . . . is not what happens here, but rather what happens at a thousand mission outposts here at home and around the world because of what happens here," Dobbs said.

During the dedication ceremony, special recognition was given to Larry Sones, architect; Tracy Bailey, contractor; Paul Jackson, builder; Diane Owen, interior design; and William Montgomery, project superintendent.

Camp Garaywa is owned and operated as the state Girls in Action (GA) campground by the Miss. WMU, an auxiliary to the MBCB.

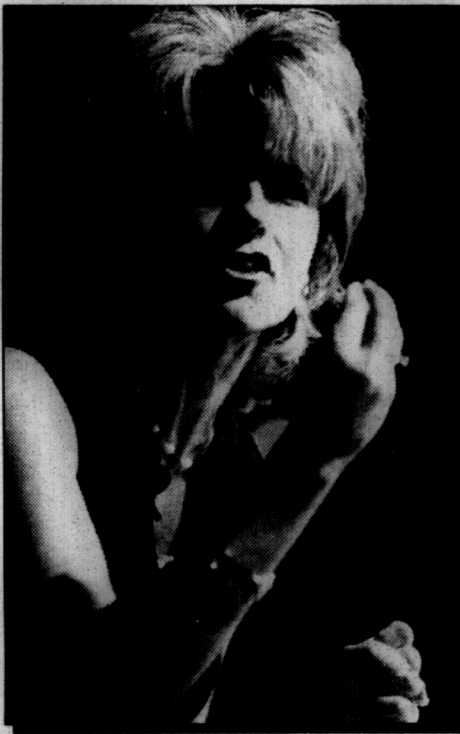
For more information and to schedule meetings at Patterson Place, contact Fran Pickett, Camp Garaywa Manager, P.O. Box 1278, Clinton, MS 39060-1278. Telephone: (601) 924-7034.



PATTERSON HONORED — Marjean Patterson (center) retired executive director of the Miss. Woman's Missionary Union (WMU), is joined March 15 at Patterson Place dedication ceremonies by Rebecca Williams (left) of Gautier, Miss. WMU president, and Kay Cassibry, current Miss. WMU executive director. The new adult lodge on the grounds of Camp Garaywa in Clinton features 30 hotel-like rooms and meeting space for groups interested in an easily-accessed facility located in the central part of the state. (Photo by Carl M. White)

Moore shares life stories of walk with God

HOUSTON, Texas (BP and local reports) — Seated in a waiting area at the Dallas-Fort Worth airport, Christian author/speaker Beth Moore fixed her gaze on her open Bible as she memorized a Scripture passage.



Moore

Like the other travelers around her, Moore, a popular Bible study teacher and author from Houston, tried not to stare at an elderly man slumped in a wheelchair nearby. His matted gray hair flowed down his back. His fingernails were overgrown. His clothes hung loosely from his emaciated frame.

As Moore studied her Bible, she felt the Holy Spirit speaking to her about the man. "Please, Lord, don't make me witness to him," Moore, a member of Houston's First Church, argued with God.

"I don't want you to witness to him, Beth," the Lord replied. "I want you to brush his hair."

"Brush his hair?" Moore retorted. "You've got to be kidding, Lord!"

Moore tried to ignore the impression and continued her Scripture memorization. God wouldn't leave her alone. Finally, she slammed down her Bible and walked over to the man.

"Sir, may I have the privilege of brushing your hair?" she asked softly.

"Speak up," he said. "I can't hear you."

"Sir, may I brush your hair?" she repeated, nearly yelling. The man agreed. As Moore,

still angry with God, searched for a brush in the man's suitcase, "a miracle of God came over me. I have never been so overcome by the fruit of the Spirit," she recalled.

When Moore finished brushing the man's tangled hair, she knelt in front of his wheelchair. "Sir, do you know my Jesus?" she said. "Oh, yes," he said. "When I met my bride, she wouldn't marry me unless I gave my life to him."

The man explained that he'd recently had open heart surgery in another city and was flying home to his wife, who'd been too weak to visit him in the hospital. He hadn't seen her in months.

"Before you came up, I was sitting here thinking what a mess I will look like for my bride," he said.

This poignant account is like many of the stories shared by Moore at the Living Proof Seminar Feb. 5-6 at First Church, Jackson.

A capacity crowd of 2800-plus gathered for the two day event, spon-

sored by the Mississippi Baptist Convention Board (MBCB) and 19 Miss. churches. (See box below).

The seminar was the culmination of a two-year project that included the efforts of the MBCB Equipping Team; Marcus Peagler, director of the MBCB Discipleship and Family Ministry Department; Miss. Woman's Missionary Union, Kay Cassibry, executive director; and the MBCB Evangelism Department, S. A. "Sonny" Adkins, director.

Moore is the author of a popular women's discipleship series published by Lifeway Christian Resources of the Southern Baptist Convention in Nashville, Tenn.

Co-hosts of the Beth Moore Living Proof Seminar in Jackson

The Mississippi Baptist Convention Board wishes to thank the following churches for co-hosting the Feb. 5-6, 1999 event:

Broadmoor Church, Jackson	First Church, Columbus
Calvary Church, Jackson	First Church, Durant
Center Ridge Church, Yazoo City	First Church, Jackson
Colonial Heights Church, Jackson	First Church Oloh, Sumrall
Emmanuel Church, Grenada	Morrison Heights Church, Clinton
First Church Fannin, Brandon	Park Place Church, Brandon
First Church, Clinton	Pineview Church, Clinton
First Church, Grenada	Roseland Park Church, Picayune
First Church, Brandon	Woodland Hills Church, Jackson
Woodville Church, Woodville	

GRANDPARENT CHURCHES

During this past Christmas holiday season, I was watching one of my grandchildren play with a toy.

I was, at the same time, halfway reading and halfway watching, doing my own thing. The toy was one of those that you would turn a corner in a certain direction, pull the string, and then be rewarded with the sounds and experiences from the direction you had it pointed.



Directions

Jim Futral, executive director-treasurer
Mississippi Baptist Convention Board

Children quickly learn how to do these things, but I watched as my grandchild was unable to pull the string out far enough — a child doing the

right thing but struggling with arms that were too short.

One effort, then another, and another — it just wasn't working. I knew why it wasn't working, and finally I laid my book aside and eased over to help solve the dilemma.

I was strong enough, and my arms were long enough, and we had a good time.

The grandchild did not know how much I was needed, and for a flash I had the thought, "I don't need that kid's game."

We both were somewhat ignorant, because the youngster needed me and I needed the experience.

I doubt that it has ever been put this way, but across our state and convention there are "grandparent churches" — strong, able, gifted, productive churches that may, for a moment, think that they do not need others.

They may analyze and evaluate their situation and conclude

that they do not need the association or the convention. They are self-contained, self-resourced, and possibly unaware of what they could mean to others.

Some of our churches that may be struggling, their capabilities small, their resources limited, and their arms short, may not realize how much they need some of these other fellowships.

In truth, we need each other. A man was explaining to me some time ago that their church did not support the association because they did not get anything out of it.

He was probably right. Their church had a large staff and multiple ministries, more than adequate facilities, and a strong financial foundation.

The real issue was not what they would get out of the association but how much the association needed them.

They did not realize it but they were a "grandparent church."

One of the great blessings of grandparenting is the privilege of doing for your grandchildren, not because you need them but because you care about them. You love them.

When you help, you begin receiving blessings that you never knew would be yours.

The small churches need the large churches more than they may understand, and the large churches need to be involved in ministries that will help the small churches maybe beyond what they comprehend.

To fail being involved with each other means that we all miss the blessings!



Annie Armstrong Easter Offering for North American Missions

TOP TEN CHURCHES IN MISSISSIPPI

1997 total offering

1. First Church, Jackson	\$94,651
2. First Church, Columbus	43,465
3. Broadmoor Church, Jackson	31,990
4. First Church, Brandon	27,955
5. First Church, Clinton	25,440
6. First Church, Brookhaven	23,820
7. Trinity Church, Southaven	22,993
8. First Church, Laurel	22,268
9. First Church, Gulfport	20,359
10. First Church, Vicksburg	20,144

1997 per capita (resident members)

1. Pleasant Hill Church, Union Church	\$765
2. Oak Grove, Lake	92
3. Big Creek, Waynesboro	66
4. Phalti Church, Prentiss	51
5. Yellow Leaf Church, Oxford	44
6. Concord Church, Bruce	37
Hebron Church, Meridian	37
8. Lucien Church, Brookhaven	36
9. Center Ridge Church, De Kalb	35
10. Chaparral Church, Waynesboro	33

Source: Computer Information Services
Mississippi Baptist Convention Board

Rec Lab offers advice to recreation ministers

GLORIETA, N.M. (BP) — Ordinary men and women are called by God to do extraordinary things, a national church recreation leader told participants in Rec Lab '99 at the Glorieta (N.M.) Conference Center, Feb. 12-17.

To show visionary leadership in their churches, recreation ministers must first

catch the vision God wants for their church, John Garner, recreation program director at LifeWay Christian Resources, said.

Catching the vision requires spending time with God, Garner continued, "obeying his Word, knowing it specifically, and knowing it in its broad application."

"Leadership doesn't come easily," he said. "It is a hard thing when Satan throws roadblocks in your way and discouragement comes."

Garner recommended what he calls "The Rumination Principle" in seeking the vision and overcoming hurdles. "Chew the cud," he challenged. "Meditate for fresh thoughts and new insights."

In the right environment — even while driving to work or mowing the lawn — people who ruminate can discover who they are and the vision for their ministry, he said.

Making a "dream list" can be helpful in setting forth desired accomplishments. While such an exercise can encourage larger thinking, he said, "remember, the list can change."

"Some dreams die," he observed. "Others grow into part of a vision."

Garner said his own vision is "that recreation ministry can reach an unseeded, leisure-oriented society."

Vision needs to be hopeful rather than wishful, he added. "Wishfulness is a desire for change with no basis in experience. Hopefulness is a desire for change with good grounding in experience."

Because life is dynamic, vision can change direction or elements of the vision can change.

"People and situations change. Experiences come into your life that make you a different person," he said.

"Vision usually unfolds over time, revealing new opportunities, previously undiscovered options and lessons learned from mistakes."

"Criticism will come," he added. "It can be constructive if you swallow some pride and make changes — modify your vision. Don't take it personally. This is God's vision given to you to be carried out by you. You are a steward of the vision. Always be gracious."

Garner said burnout, worry and fear stifle vision.

He suggested several actions to counter obstacles to visionary leadership:

- ◆ Turn fear into goal-setting. "Goals get you focused, set measuring points and can be communicated."

- ◆ Watch and listen selectively. "Listen to the best — wise, experienced, critical thinkers. Read widely, but selectively."

- ◆ Be aware of cultural shifts. "For example, work ethic has shifted to a leisure ethic. People now work to be able to enjoy leisure."

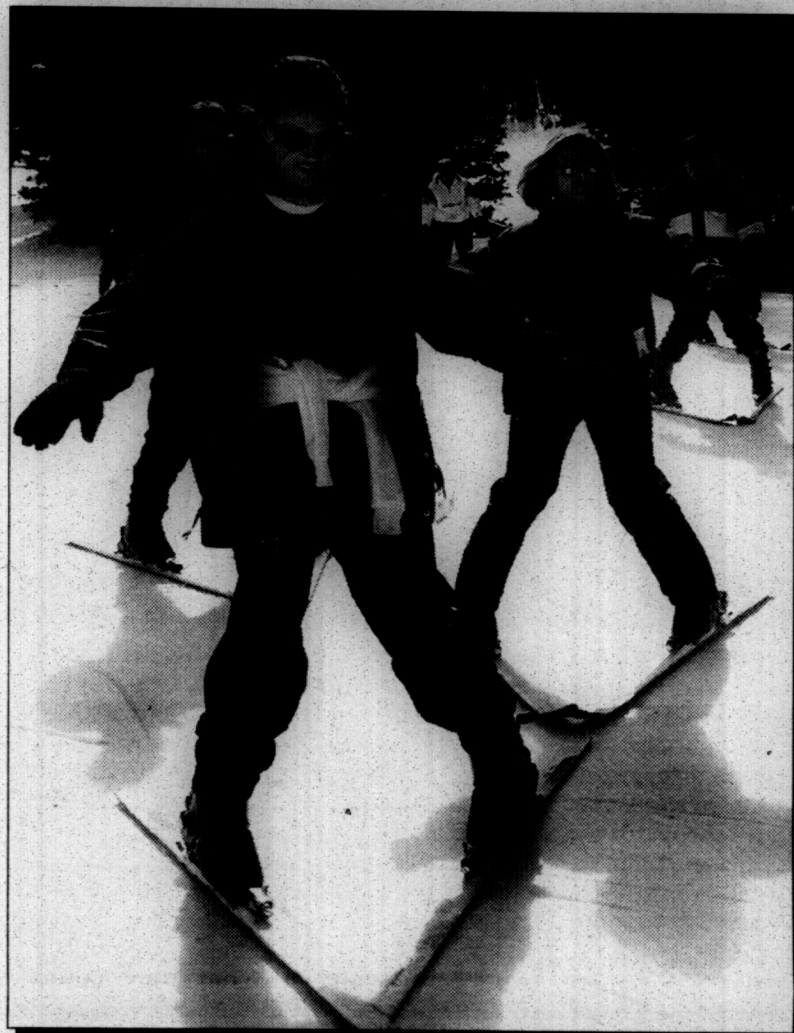
- ◆ Networking is important. "Find people who are visionary thinkers. Hang out with 'mind stimulators.' Encourage others, and be encouraged. Watch out for those who say, 'We never did it that way before; it can't be done.'"

In casting the vision, he said, keep it simple.

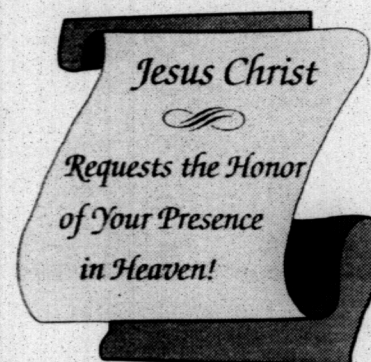
"People grasp simplicity. Telling it once isn't enough," he said. "Say it in different ways. Tell it to as many people as you can. Encourage questions. They clarify and help you think things through."

"Every one of us has the ability to change the world with the vision God gives us."

The church recreation program of LifeWay Christian Resources sponsored Rec Lab.



SMOOTH SAILING — Kristi Hewett (foreground), children's director at First Church, Clarksville, Tenn., leads the way during Ski School at the Santa Fe (N.M.) Ski Basin. Hewett and other participants in Rec Lab at Glorieta (N.M.) Conference Center tried their skills on the slopes during the Feb. 12-17 church recreation training event sponsored by LifeWay Christian Resources. (BP photo by Jim Veneman)



YOU CAN RESPOND RIGHT NOW!

Simply share the following prayer with God in your own words:

1. Lord, I admit that I need you.
(*I have sinned.*)
2. I want forgiveness for my sins and freedom from eternal death.
(*I repent.*)
3. I believe Jesus died and rose from the grave to forgive my sins and to restore my relationship with you.
(*I believe in Jesus.*)
4. By faith, I invite Jesus Christ into my life. From this time on, I want to live in a loving relationship with him.
(*I receive Christ as my Savior and Lord.*)

But as many as received him, to them he gave the right to become children of God, even to those who believe in his name (John 1:12).

If you make a decision for Jesus Christ today, contact a local Baptist church for spiritual guidance.

Annuity Board sets record for 1998 benefits paid

DALLAS (BP) — A 10% permanent increase in benefits on Jan. 1, 1998, for most annuitants, and 2,906 newly established benefits, resulted in a record for total benefits paid last year by the Annuity Board of the Southern Baptist Convention, trustees were informed during their March 1-2 meeting in Dallas.

A Mississippi Baptist was also honored for his years of service as an Annuity Board trustee.

A strong fourth quarter in financial markets pushed total assets to \$7.09 billion. Earnings for the year for most of the 13 investment funds were at historically comparable levels.

A 25% increase, from \$400 a month to \$500 a month, for those fully covered in the Church Annuity Plan Protection Section Disability Benefit, was approved.

Trustees received a report from staff that no rate increase would be necessary on July 1 for participants under the Personal Security Program (PSP) in the

Comprehensive Medical Plan, the Catastrophic Medical Plan, and the Medicare Supplement.

The Annuity Board reviews PSP rates on a quarterly basis. Rates for managed care products and products under the Employer Security Program are reviewed annually and, if necessary, adjusted at the beginning of the calendar year.

Board treasurer Jeffrey P. Billinger reported total assets were \$7.09 billion at Dec. 31, 1998, compared to \$6.35 billion at Dec. 31, 1997.

The net income for 1998 was \$825 million, the highest annual net income ever reported by the board. This compared to \$735 million net income for 1997.

Benefit payments and withdrawals in 1998 totaled \$389 million, up 18.9% over 1997. Applications were processed for 2,906 people. At year's end, there were 30,290 benefit recipients.

The Church Annuity Plan had 43,143 people from 21,794 churches in active billing status Dec. 31, and another 37,420

institutional and agency employees had active retirement accounts.

Participant contributions of \$281,683,044 represented a 7.5% increase over the year 1997.

Activity in the various insurance programs included: Life and accident claims paid in 1998 totaled \$8,744,485; disability insurance claims paid totaled \$2,918,834; and indemnity medical and dental claims paid totaled \$74,385,318. In addition, prescription drug claims of \$22,293,341 were paid by Annuity Board plans.

A total of \$4,384,631 was distributed through the board's relief program to needy retired ministers and widowed spouses.

This amount is more than \$1 million over 1997 benefit totals. The amount received from the Southern Baptist Convention Cooperative Program and special designations totaled \$1,261,803.

The entire Cooperative Program allocation for the Annuity Board and special designations is spent in relief ministry

without any expense applied.

The board's Retired Ministers' Support fund supplements the convention allocation. A significant number of people on relief receive no regular retirement annuity because their churches never enrolled them in the Church Annuity Plan.

At year's end, 710 people were receiving supplemental assistance grants, and 2,691 received the \$75 Adopt An Annuitant benefit.

The increased monthly payments of \$75 (from \$50) for Adopt An Annuitant recipients began Jan. 1, 1998. The increase in this benefit was the first since the program was implemented in 1981.

At the Monday evening dinner meeting, five trustees were honored for their years of service to the board: T. Jack Colvin Jr., Mississippi, 1991-99; Joseph A. Mack, South Carolina, 1991-99; E. Joe May, Arizona, 1992-99; R. Roy Rogers, Kansas-Nebraska, 1991-99; and Christene Y. Walker, a local member, 1991-99.



An accreditation team from the national Association for Clinical Pastoral Education recently visited Baptist Health Systems' Clinical Pastoral Education (CPE) program to assess the program. The program would become Mississippi's first program to be fully accredited by the organization. The team voted unanimously for accreditation, and the organization should render a final decision in April. Pictured (from left) are Paul Stephenson, director of pastoral care at Baptist; Chappell Wilson, CPE supervisor at Methodist Healthcare in Memphis; Donald Winslett, director of pastoral care at Pensacola Baptist Hospital in Pensacola, Fla.; Douglas Wigginton, CPE supervisor at the Veterans Administration Medical Center in Alexandria, La.; Jerry Cotton, executive vice president of Baptist Health Systems; and Jack Follis, Baptist's CPE supervisor.

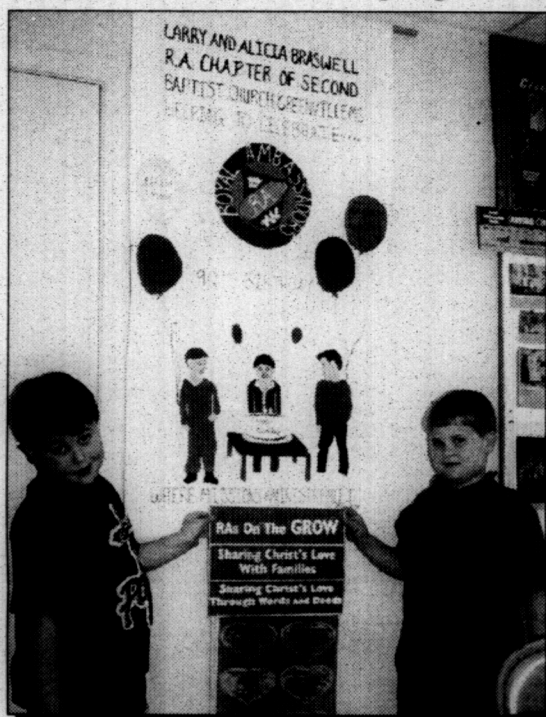
The Larry and Alicia Braswell RA Chapter of Second Church, Greenville, along with their leaders and parents helped design a new RA banner to celebrate the 90th birthday for RAs. Hunter Hearn (left) and Brent Mann (right) are pictured standing in front of the banner. The RA Chapter has given over \$800 for different missions. Mission activities include Lottie Moon, suits for pastors, Annie Armstrong, Baptist Children Village, and Pure Water Pure Love. James Kerr is leader and Stan Childers is counselor.

Cross Roads Church, Pelahatchie, will sponsor a Wild Game Supper on March 20 at 6 p.m. The guest speaker will be Billy Justus. For more information, call Brian Hill, pastor, at (601) 546-2297.

Youth ministry of First Church, Kosciusko, will sponsor Rebecca St. James and Band in the Attala County Coliseum, Kosciusko, on April 8 at 7 p.m. For more information call (601) 289-5575.

Winter Bible Study will be held at First Church, Foxworth, on March 21-23. The guest speakers are Harold Bryson, Mississippi College, Adult Bible Study, and David Rader, Tylertown Church, Youth Bible Study. Services on Sunday will include Bryson teaching youth and adults, 10 a.m.; message by Bryson, 11 a.m.; covered dish lunch at noon; and adults with Bryson and youth with Rader, 5:30 p.m. Times for services on Mon. and Tues. are 7-8:30 p.m. Ladell Blanton is pastor.

Como Church, Como, delivered food baskets, clothes, and Bibles to the less fortunate during the Christmas season. The church has an on going mission



RAs of Second Church, Greenville

MS POSITIONS AVAILABLE

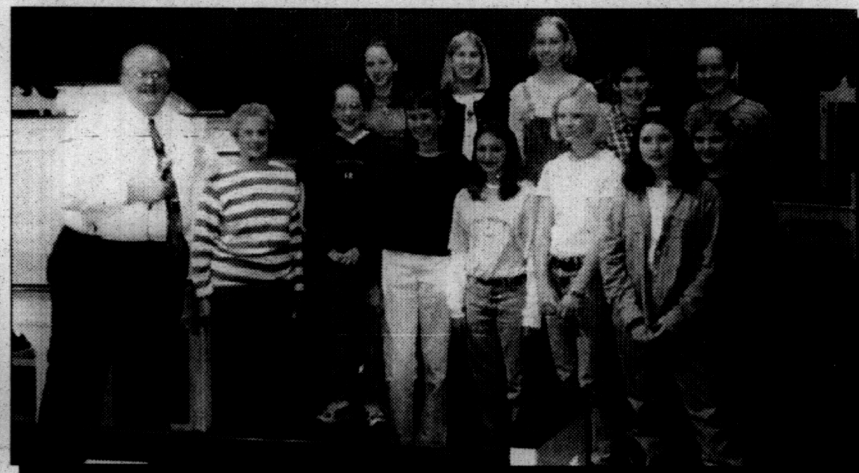
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delivering clothes to Baptist Union Mission, Memphis, Tenn.; Sunrise Boys Home, Hernando; nursing homes in the surrounding area; and tornado victims in surrounding area and out of state. The Ladies Sunday School class supplied needed items to an adopted family during the Christmas season.

Celebration choir and orchestra of Crossgates

Church, Brandon, will present "God for Us" on March 28 at 6 p.m. For more information contact the music & worship ministry office at (601) 825-2562.

Southern Hills Church, Jackson, will have dinner on the grounds to celebrate its 33rd anniversary on March 21. Sunday School will begin at 9:30 a.m., and worship at 10:30 a.m. Ralph E. Buckley is pastor.



Acteens of First Church, Columbia, held a series of bake sales recently to raise money for missions. These 7th, 8th, and 9th graders raised over \$650 to buy bicycles for the mission field in Malawi, Africa. They also held a separate bake sale and raised over \$400 for Joey Morea to help with a bone marrow transplant. Pictured with the girls are Wayne VanHorn, pastor; and Darlene Breland, mother of Claudia Brown, a Baptist missionary in Malawi.

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Revival Leaders:



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Pastor-Teacher, Woodland Park Baptist Church
President, Pressing On Ministries
Chattanooga, TN



Mike Parks

(former Minister of Music at Morrison Heights)
Associate Pastor - Worship, Green Acres Baptist Church
Tyler, Texas

REVIVAL SCHEDULE
Sunday: 6:00 p.m.
Monday - Wednesday:
Noon Luncheon (\$2.00)
and
7:00 p.m.

Childcare will be provided for all services. Children should be fed before being brought to childcare.

For more information call 924-5620.

NAMES IN THE NEWS



Middleton, Puryear, and Dorrill

Doris Puryear, (center) 92-year-old member of First Church, Kosciusko, was honored as the oldest WMU member. She was recognized during the morning worship service on Feb. 14 and presented a gift by WMU co-directors Kelly Middleton (left) and Sue Dorrill.

Trey Wooton, a member of Morrison Heights Church, Clinton, left on March 7 to serve as a Journeyman with the International Mission Board in Bolivia. He will serve with Tom and Cynthia Martin of

Mississippi as their children's teacher. Wooton will also form part of the church planting team. He is the son of Kirby and Rachel Wooton of Clinton.



Wooton

Dwight South was ordained to the ministry at Paden Church, Paden, on Jan. 17. He is now pastor of Mt. Vernon Church, Iuka.

Vera Byrd celebrated 22 years in perfect attendance in Sunday School during church services on Feb. 14. She was recognized by Vince Scoper, superintendent of Sunday School.

Old Oak Grove Church, Myrtle, recently honored **Curtis L. Gatlin** for 50 years of service as deacon of the church. He was born and raised in the Old Oak

Grove community. He joined the church there in 1935 and has remained active in the church since that time. Gatlin is pictured with his wife Edna.



The Gatlins



Herrin and Mason

Carl Mason was ordained to the gospel ministry at Antioch Church, Lawrence County, on Nov. 8. He was called to Antioch Church as pastor. Archie Herrin, director of missions, Lawrence Association, brought the message and gave the charge to Mason. Pictured (from left) are Herrin and Mason.



Johnathan McEwen (right), of Tylertown was licensed to preach on Jan. 24 at Union Church, Tylertown. McEwen, a high school senior, is a member of the men's Sunday School class, the adult choir, and operates the sound system for worship services. Pictured with McEwen is Mike Sutton, pastor.

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BAPTIST COLLEGE NEWS

William Carey College (WCC) Speech and Debate Team (Forensics) placed first overall at the Tri-State Tournament held recently at Louisiana State University, Alexandria. WCC also placed first in individual events sweepstakes, and third in debate sweepstakes. The team

(pictured, back row, from left) are Matthew Smith, McComb; Jason Ruiz, Gulfport; Josh Hewitt, Tupelo; Brian Lucas, Petal; Ron Durbin, Laurel; Chris Smith, Petal; Danny Panter, Florence; Emanuel Buckley, Hattiesburg; Tom Huebner, director of forensics; (seated) Samantha Cottrell, Hattiesburg; Mandy Mazingo, Poplarville; Mandy Trammell, Florence; Amanda Keith, Hattiesburg; Katherine Rainey, Hattiesburg; Nakia Whitehead, Picayune; and Melanie Grimes, Hattiesburg.

Mississippi College Office of Continuing Education will offer a course in SCUBA Certification. Training includes proper use of SCUBA equipment, self-rescue, and rescue of others.

Classes will be held 7-9 p.m. beginning April 6 through April 22. For registration or for more information, call Krisi Lee at (601) 925-3301 or e-mail at continuing-ed@mc.edu.

Music Department of Mississippi College (MC) will present Rick Sills in a graduate saxophone recital on March 25 at 8:15 p.m. in Aven Auditorium. Sills is majoring in applied performance in woodwinds for the master of music degree. He will be accompanied by Carol Durham, pianist. A part of the program includes a saxophone quartet with Trent Townsend, Trent Wilbanks, and Cory Shields joining Sills. While at MC he has been the graduate assistant of the MC band. He is a member of the MC Jazz Band and the MC Wind Ensemble. Sills is the son of Terri and Jerry Sills of Clinton and the husband of Debbie Daniel Sills.

The Mississippi College Chapter of the Christian Legal Society, the School of Law, and the Departments of History and Political Science and Christian Studies and Philosophy are sponsoring a prayer breakfast on March 25 at First Church, Jackson, in Fellowship Hall East at 7:30 a.m. The speaker is Steven T. McFarland, director of the Center for Law and Religious Freedom in Annandale, Va., and his topic will be "Practicing Truth in Post-Modern America." Information on tickets is available by contacting Peggy Brown at (601) 925-7106. McFarland will also give an evening lecture (free) entitled "Seven Battles the Church Cannot Afford to Lose," in Self Hall, Room 210 on the Clinton campus, March 25 at 6 p.m.

William Carey College (WCC) will receive a grant from the Spencer Foundation Small Research Grants Program. The grant, totaling \$13,800, was awarded for a study entitled, "Talkin' Proper: What Happens when Students become Agents in Facilitating their own Linguistic Growth," under the direction of Bette Ford, WCC assistant professor of language and literature. The grant will be used to support the research described by Ford in a proposal submitted earlier in the year.



WCC Speech and Debate Team

STAFF CHANGES

Parkview Church, Greenville, has called **Kevin Dobbs** as pastor. Born in Piedmont, Ala., Dobbs received his education at Jacksonville State University, Jacksonville, Ala., and Mid-America Seminary. He is currently pursuing a doctorate at New Orleans Seminary. His previous place of service was Sardis Church, Sardis City, Ala.



Dobbs

Gary Blair is now serving as the senior pastor of First Church, Verona. He is a graduate of Grand Canyon University, Southwestern Seminary, and Trinity Theological Seminary. Blair previously served as pastor of First Church, Houlika.



Blair

Calvary Church, Vicksburg, has called **Anthony Rhodes** as associate pastor and minister of music/activities. Rhodes has studied at Jacksonville State University, Jacksonville, Ala., Mississippi State University, and plans to finish his music degree at Mississippi College. He has traveled as the bass guitarist for the gospel group, "Perfect Heart." Rhodes previously served as minister of music and youth at Gore Springs Church, Gore Springs. Dwight Sibley is pastor of Calvary Church.



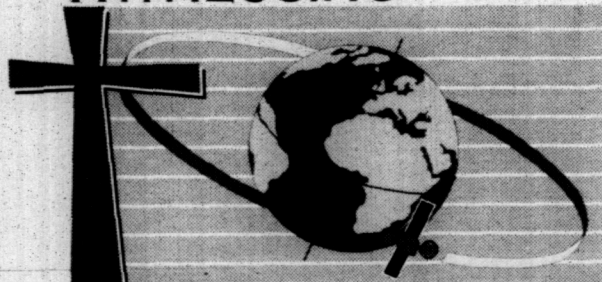
Rhodes

First Church, Natchez, has called **Dan Ratcliff** as minister of youth and activities effective Jan. 10. A native of Ferriday, La., Ratcliff received his education at Louisiana College and Southwestern

Seminary. His previous place of service was Central Church, Selma, Ala.

New Zion Church, Walnut Grove, Leake County, has called **Greg Renfrow** as pastor.

WITNESSING



THROUGH MEDIA

AWARDS BANQUET
FRIDAY APRIL 16
6:00-9:00 P.M.



David Clark
Awards Banquet
Speaker



Wes Pegues
Internet Ministry 101



Glenn McEwen
Technology 2000



David Edmonds
Sound Advice



Tony Brooks
Sound Advice
&
WOW! You're
on the Air!



Chip Turner
Getting Started
in the Media



Don Moore
NO! Your
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&
OOPS, I'm
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REGISTRATION DEADLINE IS APRIL 8, 1999
Cost of \$25 per person is for Fri. & Sat. Includes all meals and conference materials. For churches bringing four or more, cost is \$20. Advance registration must be made. Make check payable to MBCB and mail to:
Farrell Blankenship, WMT,
PO Box 530, Jackson, MS 39205-0530.

Miss. WMU slates 'get acquainted' meetings

The staff of the Mississippi Woman's Missionary Union wants to FOCUS (Friends, Opportunities, Centered on Christ, Understanding, and Sharing) on Mississippi Baptists.

WMU leadership, members, pastors, and directors of missions, are invited to a series of 'get acquainted' meetings with the WMU staff to share missions dreams and ideas.

Meeting dates, locations, and times include:

- Mar. 22, Central Church,

Brookhaven, 10 a.m.

- March 22, First Church, Natchez, 7 p.m.

- March 29, Second Avenue Church, Laurel, 10 a.m.

- March 29, First Church, Columbia, 7 p.m.

- March 30, Pearl River Association, Carriere, 10 a.m.

- March 30, First Church, Gautier, 7 p.m.

- April 12, Calhoun Association, Calhoun City, 10 a.m.

- April 12, First Church, Louisville, 7 p.m.

- April 19, location to be announced, 10 a.m.

- April 19, First Church, Newton, 7 p.m.

- April 22, First Church, Indianola, 10 a.m.

- April 22, Carrollton Church, Carrollton, 7 p.m.

- May 3, First Church, Yazoo

City, 10 a.m.

- May 3, First Church, Jackson, 7 p.m.

For more information contact Kathy Burns, Miss. WMU Dept., P.O. Box 530, Jackson, MS 39205-0530. Telephone: (601) 292-3324 or toll-free outside Jackson (800) 748 1651.

REVIVAL DATES

North Montgomery: March 21-24;

Winona,

Sunday, 10:45 a.m. and 7 p.m.; Mon.-Wed., noon and 7 p.m.; Al Gaspard, Houston, evangelist; Pete Nunez, DeQuene, Ark., music; Rick Burton, pastor.

Blythe Creek (Choctaw): March 21-24; Sunday, 11 a.m.; covered dish lunch, and 6:30 p.m.; Mon.-Wed., 7 p.m.; Bobby Irvin, Greenwood, evangelist; Joe Pate, Kosciusko, worship leader; Danny Irvin, pastor.

Calvary, Durant: March 21-26; Sunday, 11 a.m. and 6 p.m.; Mon.-Fri., 7 p.m.; Jerry Smith, former pastor, guest speaker; Rick Patrick, First Church, Durant, music.

Goss, Columbia: March 21-26; Sunday, 11 a.m. and 6 p.m.; Mon.-Fri., 7 p.m.; Valton Douglas, evangelist; Mark McArthur, music; David Laird, pastor.

Hope, Philadelphia: March 28-31; Sunday, 11 a.m. and 6 p.m.; Mon.-Wed., 7 p.m.; Steve Moore, Collinsville, evangelist; William Crenshaw, Hope Church, music; Jimmy Young, pastor.

First, Winona: April 11-14; Sunday, 6:30 p.m.; Mon.-Wed., 12 noon and 7 p.m.; Dean Register, preaching; Paul Koonce, music.

Staying Well

New Technology Helping Diagnose Breast Cancer

Linda Brown of Jackson was shocked early this year to learn she had breast cancer. The wife and mother of two took the news hard, but with resolve to fight. After her initial diagnosis, she was referred to Dr. Phillip Ley, a surgeon at Baptist who specializes in breast cancer cases.

Mrs. Brown's treatment required the immediate steps of surgery and chemotherapy. But she also agreed to join others who were researching a new treatment technique: intraoperative lymphatic mapping. "My dad died of cancer 19 years ago, and I know the importance of research," she explains. "The progress made in cancer treatment has been because of research. When [Dr. Ley] told me this treatment was research, I jumped on board."

This new procedure, performed for the first time in Mississippi by Dr. Ley and later by Dr. Alexander Haick, involves checking for the presence of microscopic cancer cells in the lymph nodes. Examination of the lymph nodes can determine if cancer has spread to the lymphatic system, and can affect the type and amount of treatment. With traditional methods, it is often necessary to remove most of the lymph nodes, but the new technology allows the surgeon to examine a small lymphatic portion called the sentinel node.

If the sentinel node biopsy determines that there is no cancer (as in about two-thirds of patients), the patient may ultimately be spared the added stress of more surgery. Sentinel node procedures have also been shown to leave the patient with fewer side effects and shorter recovery times, but are not yet the standard of care. Lymphatic mapping and sentinel node biopsy may eventually replace routine lymph node dissection.

Mrs. Brown is now undergoing chemotherapy. Despite her ordeal, she remains optimistic and grateful for the support she's received, and determined to use her experience to help others realize the importance of regular breast exams. "Over the last few weeks, I've had numerous friends and acquaintances tell me they're going to get checked," she says.

Understanding the Benefits of Sentinel Node Lymphatic Mapping

For more information, call 1-800-948-6262.

Baptist
HEALTH SYSTEMS

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WMU's bookstore goes on-line

BIRMINGHAM, Ala. (BP) — Woman's Missionary Union (WMU) has opened a bookstore on the Internet at www.wmustore.com.

Visitors can view WMU resources by author, title or subject. The bookstore can also be searched by title, author, subject, reading level, and price. The Recommendation Center features various New Hope, WMU and WorldCrafts products. Visitors to the site are encouraged to add their own suggestions.

The first 100 people to place an order at the WMU on-line store were to receive a 40% discount, excluding subscription and WorldCrafts items. Other discounts and special promotions will be offered in the future.

WMU has taken measures to ensure the safety of credit card use at the bookstore. Orders placed on-line are in a secured area. WMU uses Secure Sockets Layer (SSL) encryption, the industry standard and best available secure transaction technology.

March 1 marks the one-year anniversary of the WMU website, www.wmu.com. Future plans for the site include chat rooms and e-mail postcards.



THE PRAYER CLOSET

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EXPLORE THE BIBLE

Life vs. destruction

Psalm 1:1-6

By Ken Hester

Johnny Carson once said that if you're trilingual, you're a genius; if you're bilingual, you're above average intelligence; and if you speak only one language, you're American. Even though most of us speak only one language, I am thankful that our God communicates his character to us in many different ways.

In Psalm 19, God announces his glory, his morality, and his authority using three different methods of communication.

The skies declare God's glory. The heavens' sermon is full of variety (19:1-4). In verse one in the original Hebrew, the words "heavens" and "declare" are plural, and yet, the "glory

of God" is singular. This word construction implies that it takes the variety of cloud shapes, the myriad of colors in sunsets, the inspiring positions of rainbows, the power of storms, along with the diverse awe of the night sky to begin to speak to the single subject of God's glory. Their sermon is constant (v. 2) and comprehensive to the various peoples of this earth (v.s 3-4).

The heavens' sermon is also full of vibrancy. In verse five, David compares the passion of the heavens' sermon to the thrill of a groom after the honeymoon and a champion runner before running his favorite run.

In verse six, David describes their sermon as probing. As the

sun covers the entire congregation of the earth, the heat of the sermon warms those chilled by loneliness, melting cold hearts, and causing those who commit evil acts to sweat. God's glory, however, is just the beginning of his character.

Hester

The Scripture declares God's morality. While today's society regards morality's lines as limitations, God views his morality lines as protection.

In verses seven through 11, David makes a case for why we should trust God's morality. In these verses, he gives six names of God's Word.

He first mentions the law, which the Jews called the Torah and we know as the first five books of the Old Testament. Second, he mentions God's testimony about himself. Third, he wrote about the statutes, or precepts. When David wrote of "commands,"

he was referring to doctrine.

David's use of "fear" refers to God's judgement. The "ordinances," or "judgements" of God direct the reader to Israel's legal law. This group of verses correspondingly describes those aspects of God's Word as perfect, sure, right, pure, clean, true and righteous, as well as precious and sweet.

These verses also indicate corresponding effects upon embracing God's Word as reviving the soul, making the simple wise, giving joy to the heart, giving light to the eyes, satisfying one's spiritual palate, warning God's servant as well as giving him/her reward.

Although the Scriptures reveal the morality of God's character, the final word about God's character is addressed in the next verses.

The servants declare God's authority. The servant gives God authority 'even in seclusion' (v.12). Obadiah Sedgwick wrote, "It is the desire of a holy

person to be cleansed, not only from public, but also from private and secret sins."

The servant also gives God authority in decisions (v. 13). Rabbis distinguish all sins as those committed ignorantly or presumptuously. Victory over sin begins with submitting our will to God in prayer.

The servant also gives God authority in actions (v. 14). No pulpit can equal the effectiveness of one's daily lifestyle.

Many people recognize the God of creation. Many still appreciate the morality of Scripture. Few, however, take the road of living under God's authority.

Questions for class discussion: Who speaks in verses 1-4? Is the truth of God revealed in nature obvious to everyone? Why or why not? Which of David's "one-liners" about God's law best matches your experience with Scripture?

Hester is pastor of Mantee Church, Mantee.

FAMILY BIBLE SERIES

Seek answers

John 3:1-17

By Beth W. Cape

Whenever I hear the story of Nicodemus I can't help but remember a song we often sang in our country church in Moselle, Mississippi. It goes like this:

"Old Nicodemus went callin' to see the Lord one night. Said 'Master, somethin's wrong with me. My heart's not feelin' right.' 'You'll never change that feelin', son,' my Master did reply. 'You'll only know the answer when you've been born again.'"

Thank God for the song directors (that's what we called them back then), the preachers, and the many teachers who

taught me about being born again in my twenty-two years at that church.

Like Nicodemus, people all over the world search for a deeper meaning to life. They search for answers to the spiritual questions of life.

In Japan people visit Buddhist and Shinto temples that are found throughout that country. They go before the altar and ring a bell or clap their hands to wake up their gods. Many Japanese people have altars in their homes where they place food and water for their gods. They don't know about the God who never sleeps and doesn't need their food offer-

ings — the Savior who died because of his love for them!

Many people in our country try to hide their need for God. They search for fulfillment through work, or money, or material things. Even people who have been born again find it so easy to forget the most important things in life.

Nicodemus was searching for answers, and he went to the right place. Jesus didn't give him easy answers but said things that would make him think.

The conversation between Jesus and Nicodemus can help us understand that our journey of faith is a continuous journey. Just like our physical birth, our spiritual birth is only the beginning.

As we search for answers to our many questions in life,

we have to go to the right place. Hebrews 4:15-16 says, "But we do not have a high priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses but one who has been tempted in all ways as we are, yet without sin. Let us therefore draw near with confidence to the throne of grace that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need."

We are to go boldly to that throne of grace with our questions, with our needs. We will find him there. He expects us to fail. He knows we are but babes, and what can one expect from a baby?

In his book *Gentle Thunder*, Max Lucado says it like this: "Look at the newborn baby. What can he do? Can he walk? Can he feed himself? No, not yet. But someday he will. It takes time to grow. But is the parent ashamed of the baby? Of course not. They are proud.

They know that growth will come with time. So does God. God is often more patient with us than we are with ourselves. We assume that if we fail, we aren't born again. If we stumble, then we aren't truly converted. If we have the old desires, then we must not be a new creation.

"In many ways your new birth is like your first: In your new birth God provides what you need; someone else feels the pain, and someone else does the work. And just as parents are patient with their newborn, so God is patient with you. But there is one difference. The first time you had no choice about being born; this time you do. The power is God's. The effort is God's. The pain is God's. But the choice is yours."

Cape is director of children and family ministry at First Church, Picayune.

LIFE AND WORK

Staying focused

Mark 13:5-13, 35-37

By Doug Bain

How are we as believers to live out our faith in today's unsettled world? How are we to demonstrate bold discipleship in an uncertain context of "what if?"

Mark 13, "the Little Apocalypse," may seem an unlikely source for guidance in times of distress and upheaval. It is a passage in which Jesus addressed both the destruction of Jerusalem and the return of the Son of Man. The apocalyptic form of thought, which surfaces in times of impending crisis, directs attention to absolute confidence in God and faithfulness during the present crisis. Rather than searching for esoteric infor-

mation about end times, we need to stay focused on issues of faithful obedience. That focus will orient us toward discipleship that is courageous indeed.

Not fooled by unsettling events (vv. 5-8). False claims about a messiah or frightening reports of an impending disaster were not to deceive the disciples nor to divert their attention. Such events are part of the fabric of history but do not signal the ultimate end.

Believers are to keep alert and watch and not be caught unaware. Our lives and our Christian service cannot be disrupted by panic and fear of unsettling events. Times of dis-

aster and crisis have historically brought believers together. We are to share and rebuild rather than have a bunker mentality and hole up in isolation.

God is God even in disturbing times, as when Jerusalem was facing the Y70 crisis and certain destruction because of rising Zealot terrorism.

A flood of data about disruption of supplies and services should not obscure our faith that God alone is still in control of history and will bring his purposes to pass.

Dependence on the Holy Spirit (vv. 9-11). In Palestine under Roman rule, the disciples expected to suffer arrests and beatings because of their Christian faith. Their sufferings were opportunities for significant witness as the Holy Spirit empowered them.

Disorienting events are occasions for reorientation. The

Holy Spirit works within believers to use distressing situations as times for dynamic caring and sharing.

Living in light of his promise (vv. 12-13). Jesus taught his disciples that they would experience betrayal, hatred, and even death on account of him, but they were to be steadfast, unmovable, standing firm to the last. It was in those times of upheaval that their faith would "stand them in good stead."

When under hostile attacks because of Christian belief, we are to live in light of God's promises. Standing firm to the end shows a faith grounded in the absolute certainty of God's promise.

Staying alert (vv. 35-37). Rather than being paralyzed by fear of "what if," or consumed by worry over potential disaster, believers are to stay alert — living with the certainty of Christ's return. His return is always

imminent. It refers not so much to a certain point in time, but that ultimate kind of time which is always impinging on history, hovering over history. This ultimate time which is always on the horizon, is like an alternate time zone, parallel to and even breaking into history, giving our time urgency!

Alert, focused, and always ready; not overwhelmed by unsettling events or reports; not complacent in faith; not distracted from the assignment; not distracted by speculation about the end; not distracted by fear or frenzied activity to endure security; but focused on significant discipleship and on absolute confidence in God. This is the challenge for the believer in times of impending upheaval: to be focused on faithful discipleship and on the faithfulness of God!

Bain is chairman and professor of the Biblical Division at Blue Mountain College.

THE VILLAGE VIEW



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Gifts of Honor and Memory

A portion of **The Village View** is allocated each month to a list of Gifts of Honor and Memory. Many groups and individuals elect to pay tribute to others through this sensitive, meaningful and helpful medium. This feature is hopefully designed to further honor, with taste and respect, those who are and have been special to our special friends.

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Group sets out to change face of Ohio city

REVIEWING PLANS

Three members of the Greater Youngstown Coalition of Christians (GYCC) board of spiritual overseers review plans for a regional leadership conference, held each fall in the Ohio city: (from left) Jim Cook, pastor of Christ Community Church; Dwight Dumas, GYCC's executive director; and Julius Davis, pastor of Friendship Baptist Church. (BP special photo)



YOUNGSTOWN, Ohio (BP) — Finding the key to urban renewal and social reform in America is as easy as checking a Bible's table of contents, said Dwight Dumas.

"Many letters which Paul wrote were directed to believers in specific geographic regions — Corinth, Ephesus, Philippi — not to one denomination or one church," said Dumas, executive director of the Greater Youngstown Coalition of Christians (GYCC).

"The believers worked as

one body to reach their area for Christ. That's our model. We will no longer be separated by our racial, denominational or socio-economic differences. We are the church of Youngstown."

Since 1994, dozens of churches among the Youngstown area's 225,000 population have joined together to form the Greater Youngstown Coalition of Christians. Today, with more than 25,000 Christians in 60 churches involved in educational, social, economic, urban renewal, and health-care programs, the GYCC has kindled a revitalization in town.

Like nearby Cleveland and Pittsburgh, Youngstown became heavily invested in the steel industry after World War II.

Unlike its neighbors, in the late 1970s when the steel business declined, Youngstown's lack of economic diversity led to a severe recession.

As people left the city, so did churches, and the Christians in Youngstown lost their effectiveness and influence in the urban setting.

In the early 1990s,

several local pastors realized that reconciliation between the diverse groups of Youngstown Christians was the only solution to the town's troubles.

"A small group of us would meet every Friday morning to pray for renewal together," said Gary Frost, pastor of Rising Star Church in Youngstown and former second vice-president of the Southern Baptist Convention.

"We had a real burden for Youngstown and knew that Christian unity was the only answer."

In four short years, led by nine pastors who form a board of spiritual overseers and nine laypeople who serve as the board of directors, the GYCC already has taken major steps toward fulfilling its mission.

This diverse group of Christians — black and white, urban and suburban, encompassing 25 denominations — has established a school, developed plans for job training and a Christian health clinic, and provided social service information for families.

Working side by side for urban renewal strengthens churches' Christian unity, which in turn increases their ministry's power, Dumas said.

"Our churches are beginning to understand that we need one another regardless of denominational and socio-economic

differences," he said. "Because of our inward oneness in Christ, we are more effective in reaching outward."

"Some people here don't trust Christians. They see you as just a 'do-gooder,' so we have to overcome that barrier. Plus, there have been so many swindlers who have come through Youngstown, so many housing initiatives in the 1970s and 1980s which were started but never finished."

American Christians are hungry for these success stories. Dumas regularly travels the nation sharing Youngstown's vision with other communities.

He recently spoke at a Tony Evans Urban Alternative conference in Dallas and a community mobilization conference for pastors in Toledo, Ohio.

"For too long, division has kept Christians from having the influence we could have had," Frost said.

"Now, through prayer and working together as churches and communities across racial, denominational, and socio-economic lines, we've seen God do larger things in our city, supernatural things."

"Christians are supposed to be the salt and light to our world. In Youngstown, we've found that we're saltier and brighter together," Frost said.

Youngstown school offering kids 'another choice'

YOUNGSTOWN, Ohio (BP) — Poorly funded public schools, expensive private schools, or the challenge of homeschooling. Parents in inner-city Youngstown, Ohio, had few options for their children's education — until now.

This year, 624 students in urban Youngstown are attending their first year at Eagle Heights Academy, a public charter school privately run by Christians.

"We just wanted to give parents another choice for their children," said Gary Frost, pastor of Rising Star Church and member of the Greater Youngstown Coalition of Christians (GYCC), a group of area churches which have united to provide educational, social, economic, and urban renewal programs to the community.

The Greater Youngstown Coalition of Christians received its school charter in early 1998 and currently, with classes in kindergarten through sixth grade, Eagle Heights is the largest charter school in Ohio.

Four pastors and a Christian attorney form the school's board of education.

After only a few months in operation, Eagle Heights Academy already has begun to positively affect the lives of students, parents, and staff.

"I've been in education for 20 years, and there are few public schools which compare with

what we have here," said Jim LaRiccia, principal of Eagle Heights, "but it's not what I'm doing or what any other person is doing, it's what God is doing through all of us."

More than 1,000 volunteers have helped renovate the facility — a school building erected in 1907 and abandoned six years ago — along with tutoring the children, working in the office, and serving in the cafeteria.

"There's constantly someone who is being called by the Lord to work with us," LaRiccia said.

Many gifted educators also have accepted the challenge of working at Eagle Heights Academy, even though the starting salary range is nearly \$4,000 less than other Youngstown public school teaching positions.

Every classroom at the charter school has a certified teacher as well as an educational assistant, so children receive more one-on-one attention.

"When I accepted the position of principal in July 1998, I told the board there weren't going to be any good teachers out there who would want to work for such a low salary," LaRiccia said.

"I was wrong. Our teachers are phenomenal. They're enthusiastic and have amazing talent."

"Even on their small salaries they're buying things for their

classrooms. Some have volunteered to coach sports."

"When you go into the classrooms, you just sense the love. Many teachers have felt called by God to our school," LaRiccia said.

In response to the school leaders' commitment, the Youngstown community has poured out support and encouragement.

Many parents have sent thank you notes, expressing gratitude for the hard work in launching the school.

One mother sent a letter to a local TV station praising her child's teacher and educational assistant.

Her child had been suspended six times the previous school year, but had made a complete turnaround within a few weeks at Eagle Heights.

The educators received an award from the station.

Other area schools, meanwhile, are taking notice.

"The Youngstown public schools are working harder to have a better product, because now parents have another option," Frost said.

"Before, they didn't have a choice. If they couldn't afford a private or Christian school, then their children had to attend whichever public school was in their district."

"Now, we're here. Any child anywhere in the city can attend

Eagle Heights. That has spawned a competition, because parents are going to choose the school which best equips their child."

"Public schools now have to shape up."

In the future, Eagle Heights plans to add one grade a year up to the 12th grade, as well as continue to develop its before- and after-school latchkey program for children whose parents have to work.

Set apart from the regular school day, the latchkey program has complete freedom for Christian teaching.

Children can attend Bible studies and activities, plus have prayer together.

The Eagle Heights Academy board of education hopes that combining a solid educational foundation with optional Christian programs will help revitalize the Youngstown community through the minds of its youngest citizens.

"One of our big prayers is that not only will the community help us, but we'll be able to help the community," LaRiccia said.

"Through this cycle, everything around us will start to flourish."

"We're beginning to see it, but there's no pressure, because it's in the Lord's hands, and that makes life a whole lot easier," he said.

Bibliocipher

By Charles Gary
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JXYJ JXZ WZCJPAZQ
QXVKAF HZ SZA-
AVTXZPGQ, YCF VS JXZ
QYNZ HVFD, YCF
OYGIYMZGQ VS XPQ
OGVNPQZ PC LXGPQJ
HD JXZ WVQOZA.

ZOXXQPYCQ JXGZZ: QPE

Clue: S = I

Have fun with cryptography and exercise your Bible knowledge. A King James Version Bible verse has been encoded by letter substitution. The same letter is substituted throughout the puzzle. Solve by trial and error. Answer to last week's puzzle: John One: One.